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ABSTRACT

The open reading lab program at Muskegon Community College includes: (1) student/instructor interview; (2) test diagnosis; (3) student/instructor conferences discussing test results, self-evaluation, and student program development; (4) supervised lab work; (5) student/instructor bi-weekly conferences assessing performance and progress; and (6) final conference evaluating total experience. Entry to the program is determined by an interview between the student and the instructor. Agenda for the interviews are: student identified needs; student's class schedules, employment, and other responsibilities; type of program--credit, non-credit, long term, short term; and the open lab schedule and enrollment procedures. The responsibilities of the reading lab paraprofessionals include: orientation of students to the lab, extension and amplification of the instruction direction given in the conferences, and checking daily work sheets and recording student progress. The professional staff consists of two full-time instructors, two full-time paraprofessionals, and three work/study students. (WR)

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"THE ROLE OF AN OPEN READING LAB IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE"

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Muskegon Community College

November 1, 1973

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THE ROLE OF AN OPEN READING LAB IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Carnegie Commission in its Profile of the Two Year Colleges, published in 1971 states that: "At some time during the post-war resurgence of the two year college it came to be known as the people's college."[1]

It is clear that the community college has much to offer the public. It provides access to skills and knowledge necessary in coping with our sophisticated society. It provides these promptly and at a nominal cost. As a dynamic and innovative force in higher education it is able to gear its resources to meeting many existing and emerging educational needs of the community. Charles Monroe states succinctly in his book, Profile of the Community College, "The college belongs to the community and the community belongs to the college."[2]

As an educational resource in the two year college, an open lab reading program should become a basic support system, providing opportunities for every citizen in the community. The open lab with its flexible time programming is able to accomodate not only the college student during the college day but men and women from the workaday world. No longer does the Monday through Friday 8:00 to 5:00 syndrome prevail. The open lab avails itself to the scheduling of everyone interested in its use -- high school students in the Upward Bound program, Community Action Against Poverty (CAAP) programs, federally funded Work Incentive Programs (WIN), programs for Senior Citizens (SAM), businessmen, tradespeople, and housewives now college bound. Truly an open lab reading program can be nearly all things to all people.

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[1]Leland L. Medsker and Dale Tillery, Breaking the Access Barriers: A Profile of the Two Year Colleges, Fourth Carnegie Commission Profile (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1971), p. 15.

[2]Charles R. Monroe, Profile of the Community College (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Incorporation, 1972), p. 138.

Occupying a pivotal position in the academic affairs of the institution, the insured success of the open lab reading program comes from the support and involvement of the college faculty. Student referrals, recommendations and materials, program planning and instructional assistance are necessary reinforcements which can be contributed by instructors. It is recognized that some faculties are reluctant to admit that the reading lab has a role in academia. Many faculties perceive the reading lab as a center for remediation failing to recognize that the purpose of the program is to aid all students in reaching their academic potential. And so, may I point out that if a reading lab will align itself with an influential department and designate that faculty as ex offico to the lab, it would then be possible to include them in its planning and policy making. Reading staff members can offer services to faculty members which will facilitate their teaching, i.e., text book evaluation, reading tests and evaluation of students reading competency, demonstrations of study skill techniques and vocabulary for specific subject matter. As a result of faculty/reading staff interaction, the instructional procedures and policies of the lab would be proliferated through out the total faculty.

And now the Muskegon story. Muskegon Community College draws from both urban and rural populations. It is located on Lake Michigan directly across from Milwaukee. Although it is situated in a beautiful area of dunes and lakes, it is highly industrialized with the college providing most of the cultural advantages for the community. Its population is 157,426 approximately 10% of which belong to minority groups concentrated primarily in the inner city. A recent survey of Muskegon County revealed that an estimated 9,173 men and women, equal to 11.4% of the adult population fall into the functionally illiterate category. The college enrollment exceeds 4,000 with 117 faculty members. Its offerings are comprehensive. Community services are important as the college

views every resident as a potential student. Concurrent with this philosophy, it is continually necessary to review and evaluate the reading program.

A collegue recently stated that establishing an open lab for a college reading program takes Scarecrow's brain, Tinman's heart, and Lion's courage -- well said! Departure from the tradition of regulated classes is certainly comparable to finding one's way through the Land of Oz. This approach demands constant planning, organizing, directing and controlling in order to prevent a crisis oriented operation. A broad general statement of operational direction must be made, with specific objectives related to it; specific activities and authority relationships must be established; motivational processes to stimulate faculty and staff should be utilized, and a final evaluation of initial decisions and revision of plans, if necessary, should be instituted.[3] This takes time but it insures efficient operation of a reading program.

Following a period of exploration and research, the open lab reading program at MCC was established in the fall semester of 1972 in order to provide an individualized reading course for each student based on diagnosis and prescription. Needs were identified, priorities established and program tailored. Reading instructors assumed responsibility for designing custom tailored programs for students based on analyses of students' strengths and weaknesses. This type of instruction requires constant appraisal of student progress while providing programs designed to improve performance in rate, comprehension and vocabulary.

Upon referral, the program design follows:

1. Student -- instructor interview
2. Test diagnosis
3. Student/instructor conference discussing test results -- self evaluation, and student program development

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[3] Marciene Mattleman and Michael H. Kean, "Project Management to Improve Reading Instruction," Educational Technology, (September, 1963), pp. 13, 14.

4. Supervised lab work
5. Student/instructor bi-weekly conferences assessing performance and progress
6. Final conference evaluating total experience

There are generally two kinds of referrals -- self referral and instructor referral. Self referred day students consist mainly of two types: the average or slightly below average and the more able student wishing to improve efficiency. The chief source for these students is a testing program conducted in the freshman English classes early in the school year. Perhaps 15% of self referred students have read or heard about the program. Additionally the local Urban League and Upward Bound Program are sponsoring high school students for work in reading skills concurrent with their school programs. Many adults returning to college enroll in the lab to refresh their reading skill. Business executives, engineers, and other professionals are enrolled in adult education classes.

Often an instructor recommends individuals for specialized help. These are generally first year students with glaring reading deficiencies; often they are products of the inner city or rural areas. They seemingly feel the need to attend college, but are often unaware of prerequisites necessary for college success. If personal motivation is present and individualized program developed, these students benefit from their work in the lab. Holding power for this type of student is about 80%.

Entry point to the program is the interview between the student and the instructor. Agenda for the interview are:

1. Student-identified needs
2. Student's class schedules, employment, and other responsibilities
3. Type of program -- credit, non-credit, long term, short term
4. The open lab schedule and enrollment procedures

This is not an indepth interview, but rather a brief survey of the student's relationship with this course in conjunction with others he is taking and a discussion of how well he will be able to adapt this work to his curriculum and daily schedule. The details of the interview are recorded and appointments made for testing and conferences. The diagnostic instruction is said to be a way of thinking about reading. According to Richard Burnett in a paper from the 13th annual convention of the IRA if all teachers of reading used diagnosis as the basis for reading instruction there would be no need for remediation.[4] It is quite evident to college reading instructors that all teachers have not used diagnostic teaching but in turn this should behoove us in the college reading field to do so. The reading staff at MCC compiled a battery of tests including screening tests, diagnostic tests, informal reading inventories, pre and post tests for specific materials, placement tests for certain programmed materials, binocular vision tests, and auditory discriminatory tests. Again, diagnosis is individualized. From the battery of tests available, instructors select those which are best able to assess a particular student's capabilities. Diagnosis leads to prescription.

The initial student/instructor conference evaluates test results and discusses student reading goals. Both become prerequisites for the student's individualized reading program. Specific skill areas which need improvement are identified; the prescription of materials to be used for these improvements is compiled. From such a prescription work assignments are determined. This serves as a floor plan for the student's individualized program.

This conference is indepth as well as comprehensive dealing with specific problems in learning, and physical and emotional problems affecting learning.

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[4]Richard W. Burnett, "The Classroom teacher as a Diagnostician," The Classroom Teacher as a Diagnostician, Dorothy L. DeBoer, ed. International Reading Association Conference Proceedings, Vol. XIII, Part IV, (Newark: 1971), p. 10.

The Reading Lab at MCC is supervised by well-prepared paraprofessionals. Their responsibilities include:

1. orientation of students to materials in the lab, through the use of video tapes and personal demonstration
2. extention and amplification of the instructional direction given in the conferences
3. checking daily work sheets and recording student progress

Reading instructors recommend that students spend a minimum of three hours per week in the lab. During this time, they work to complete the reading prescription.

The basic strength of an individualized program in reading is the availability of personalized/instructor interaction. The setting is the bi-weekly conference. The student's progress is constantly checked and adjustments made to the prescription. It is here where reading achievement is encouraged. Emotional reinforcement is no small part of this conference. Effective programming balances cognitive and affective aspects of learning.

Concluding the student's work in the lab is a final conference with his instructor where total progress is evaluated in terms of program goals, post test results and the student's self evaluation. Most often this is the termination point, however, some students elect to continue for a semester. It is not unusual for students to return for informal reading counselling and reinforcement during their remaining years at the college.

It should be noted here that individualized education is expensive. Instructional time accomodates fewer students with the program requiring extensive record keeping and material production. MCC required no professional staff additions. Currently the staff consists of:

1. two full time instructors
2. two full time paraprofessionals

3. three work/study students

Full time instructors are expected to carry a student load of 150 students per semester working a 40 hour week. Weekly conferences include a total of 75 students. Instructors:

1. direct the paraprofessionals
2. confer with faculty
3. consult with community
4. prepare individualized materials
5. conduct seminars

Of course, regular college faculty responsibilities are assumed as well.

Mandatory to an individualized program is the innovative use of paraprofessionals. It has been suggested in the literature that paraprofessionals be selected from college trained persons in the community who volunteer their services. At MCC, second year students were interviewed and employed after graduation. Fortunately, these people were familiar with the general operation of the reading lab and its materials, thus eliminating a long period of preparation. Experience proved that youthful paraprofessionals brought to the lab a student oriented environment. They were familiar with instructors and texts, and attractive to the student body.

Specific responsibilities include:

1. extending and reinforcing instruction
2. developing materials under supervision
3. supervising students work programs
4. maintaining and coordinating student records
5. supervising work/study students
6. maintenance of lab equipment and materials
7. arranging student appointments with instructors serving as liaison

Work/study students are responsible for semi-clerical duties. Their duties include:

1. general typing
2. stapling and collating material
3. running errands
4. xeroxing
5. specific lab maintenance
    a. sorting and repairing materials
    b. identifying materials needing replacement
    c. maintenance of paperback library
    d. maintenance of student files (alphabetizing and filing student papers)
6. housekeeping
7. telephone

An open structured program allows for individualized instruction and a great amount of student freedom; it demands a great deal of organization. Like an iceberg, the individualization and freedom are obvious, but the organization and planning are the two thirds below the water line. Every teaching situation demands different kinds of records. At MCC we keep the following:

1. entry forms
2. initial conference records
3. student progress records
4. prescriptions
5. student memos on conferences
6. student record sheets
7. test scores

Entry forms, initial conference records, student progress records, and prescriptions are all stored in filing folders which the instructor keeps for each of his students. When a student comes in for a conference, the instructor

has "at his fingertips," a complete profile of the student's progress, the skills he has developed, and those he still needs to work on, the materials he has used, and those he still needs. Compilation of this data could indicate the value of certain materials and the kinds of students who find them most beneficial. Student memos on their conferences are kept in the student's personal folder so that he can use them as a guide to his work in the lab. The student also keeps records of all his work in his folder. Test scores are filed in the office in locked files. Steps are now being taken to put these test scores in the computer for storage. It is imperative that records are meticulously kept, but good record keeping has its rewards. Instructors know how each student is functioning at any given time.

A logical adjunct to an open lab is a Peer Tutoring Center. After its establishment at MCC, the Peer Tutoring Center mushroomed. At its inception in February of 1973 it provided services for six students. There are now, in October of 1973, 109 students being tutored. Its success may be partly attributed to the following factors:

1. tutors selected are recommended by instructors
2. the center insists on a close relationship between tutor and instructor who confer often -- this insures faculty support
3. tutoring sessions are held in the Reading Lab where the supervisor is able to observe what is happening and is available when problems arise

The tutors at MCC receive the same hourly wages as work/study students and they too learn as they work.

Establishing an open lab is not a dream come true, but the beginning of a dream. It opens the doors to creative programs, imaginative teaching and relevant student learning. Our faculty frequently sits down, evaluating the present program with the idea of expanding and exploring new services. Currently

we are interested in learning more about the value of bio feedback and trancendental meditation, we are in the process of opening a Diagnostic Center. Discussions are under way with our data processing director exploring the use and value of the computer in both reading education and research. It's great to teach in a community college and be part of the Spirit of Tomorrow -- the only limitations are those set by one's self.

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